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# THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

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### BERTRAND RUSSELL—THEN AND NOW

FOR the purpose of this paper I have rather arbitrarily, I suppose, divided Russell's work into two periods, that written before, and that written after the outbreak of the great war. By so doing I am enabled to point out the very different implications in what is substantially one theory of knowledge, simply through a shifting of emphasis, a change of attitude. For this reason I include with Russell's earlier work all the essays in *Mysticism and Logic*, published 1918, and his volume on *The Scientific Method in Philosophy*.

"The philosophy," says Bertrand Russell, in his volume on *The Scientific Method in Philosophy*,<sup>1</sup> "which is to be genuinely inspired by the scientific spirit, must deal with somewhat dry and abstract matters, and must not hope to find an answer to the practical problems of life." Yet I venture to affirm that behind "the theoretical understanding of the world, which is the aim of philosophy" and the early ideal of Russell, there is a judgment of value, a conviction—not wholly the result of reasoning—of what is good or what is the desirable life. For a philosophy in its widest sense is, I take it, simply an attitude toward life; and in its more technical usage, a critical inquiry into the validity of the assumptions underlying both the attitude and its manifestations. In other words, all philosophy is primarily ethical in its nature, a record of the adjustment of the individual to his environment, in the broadest sense of the term. And Bertrand Russell at his remotest is not half so remote from life as he would believe himself.

His early method is that of empiricism coupled with rigorous intellectualism. He has staunch faith in the ability of the mind to reach truth through relentless, rigid analysis. What such analysis reveals to him is a world of logical and mathematical relationships whose contemplation, made possible by the rigorous employment of the mind, leads, paradoxically enough, to something almost akin to

<sup>1</sup> Essay 1, page 17.

mysticism. For the farther Russell carries this method of analysis, the more his world seems to become transformed, translated over into another dimension, as it were, the term "being" coming to be used for classes of things which analysis reveals, but which have no concrete existence. "Such entities as relations," he says,<sup>2</sup> "appear to have a being which is in some way different from that of minds and from that of sense data;" and he goes on to demonstrate that there must be such entities as universals as well, and that their being, too, is not merely mental. Herein he indicates the two fundamental canons of realism—the independence of objects of knowledge of their being thought of or in any way apprehended by the minds which know them, and the externality of relations. This is, at least *in part*, and in its bare statement, more or less of a "common-sense" point of view. Yet in the case of Russell, as of others, it does tend to develop into something like the mystic notion of the unreality of the world of sense experience as compared with the world of "ultimate reality," the world of contemplation—in Russell's case, the world of logical and physical laws and ideal relationships.

There is something quite Greek in Russell's skeptical mistrust of the world of actual matter of fact experience.<sup>3</sup> For all that he alludes to "the naïve faith of Greek philosophers in the omnipotence of reasoning,"<sup>4</sup> he himself in his earlier writing shows a profound distrust of impulse, instinct or intuition as a guide for either knowledge or action. There is much in his early philosophy which distinctly parallels the metaphysic and the ethics of Stoicism. For him, as for the Stoic, the world has a status of its own, quite independent of our ideas about it. His is a mechanistic universe, following laws of its own, obstinately refusing to adapt itself to the ideals and the values of man's inner life.<sup>5</sup> It is subject to inflexible law which is neither good nor bad. It is not nature which is good or bad, but our attitude toward nature, our interpretation of our place or function in the scheme of things. In "The Elements of Ethics," and particularly in "The Free Man's Worship," Russell steadily refuses to read into the world of nature any human values whatsoever. "Such in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief." And again, "From the fact that the existent world is of such and such a nature, nothing can be inferred as to what things are good

<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Phil.*, Chap. 9.

<sup>3</sup> See page 396 following.

<sup>4</sup> *Sci. Meth. in Phil.*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Here Russell seems strongly reminiscent of Spinoza as well as of the Stoics, except that Spinoza postulated the goodness of the universe.

or bad." It follows for him that complete suspension of judgment is the only rational attitude.<sup>6</sup> He does not seem to question whether it be possible to maintain this attitude for more than a minute. He takes it for granted that it *is* possible. This dictum seems to arise from an unconscious tendency to separate the human mind and the "external" "real world" of nature, to consider man as being somehow outside nature, for all that he speaks of man as a child of nature, "subject still to her power." Our business is to see things as they are, independent of our judgment of them, and he never questions but that such complete suspension of judgment is possible. Curiously enough, Russell's very statement embodies its own refutation. Human values have no place in the world of nature, he says. Therefore we *ought* to suspend judgment. And so saying, he leaves a value-judgment on our hands. What are we to do with it?—except possibly to conclude that judgments of value are inevitable, and that ideals are as truly a part of the real world, at least so far as human beings are concerned, as mechanism and mechanical causation and the rest. And it is by unconsciously acknowledging that this is the case, that he is enabled to go on to erect a highly idealistic ethics upon his naturalistic foundation.

He starts, of course, where he finds himself. Was there ever, Professor R. B. Perry says, an absolutist who thought he could start anywhere else? And his common-sense assumption is that "since a proposition can only be proved by means of other propositions, it is obvious that not all propositions can be proved. Thus we must continue our backward inquiry for reasons until we reach the kind of proposition so simple or so obvious that nothing more fundamental can be found from which to deduce it." Again, he says, "There can never be any reason for rejecting one instinctive belief except that it clashes with others." And again, "Starting with the common beliefs of daily life, we can be driven back from point to point, until we come to some general principle which seems luminously evident and is not capable of being deduced from anything more evident." His criterion of truth thus seems to be self-evidence and inter-consistency. He does not believe that the proof of a proposition may point in a forward rather than a backward direction, be justified by its consequences when applied in action.<sup>7</sup> And the result of his reasoning is a dual universe—a world of "nature," mechanistic and independent of human values; and quite distinct and separate from this world of fact a world of universal laws, of ideas and ideals—a world which may be revealed to man's reason

<sup>6</sup> *Elements of Ethics*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Essays on "Pragmatism" and "James' Conception of Truth" in *Phil. Essays*.

and worthy of his devotion,<sup>8</sup> yet existing in its own right, independent of his knowledge, desires, and opinions. Not only is mathematics [*e. g.*] independent of us and our thoughts, but in another sense we and the whole universe of existing things are independent of mathematics." Again, "When we say a thing is good in itself, and not merely as a means, we attribute to the thing a property which it either has or has not, quite independent of our opinion or wishes. Good and Bad are qualities which belong to objects, independently of our opinions, just as round and square do." Thus, as Santayana puts it, for Russell *Good* is an absolute, not a relative, thing, a primary and not a secondary quality, as it were. It is because this world of absolute values is to be disclosed through the rigorous employment of reason, that Russell, like the Stoic and the Aristotelian, is led to look upon mind or consciousness as something whose use is really to contemplate the world of universal laws, ideal relationships and absolute values. "The free intellect," he says, "will see as God might see, without a *here* and *now*, without hopes and fears—calmly, dispassionately, in the *sole and exclusive desire for knowledge—knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain*. Hence also the free intellect *will value more the abstract and universal knowledge* into which the accidents of private history do not enter, *than the knowledge brought by the senses*, and dependent as such knowledge must be, upon an exclusive and personal point of view and a body whose sense organs distort as much as they reveal."<sup>9</sup>

Russell is decidedly non-humanistic in his refusal to base the laws of mathematics and logic in human reason. "Philosophers," he says, "have commonly held that the laws of logic, which underlie mathematics, are laws of thought, laws regulating the operations of our minds. By this opinion the true dignity of reason is very greatly lowered; it ceases to be an investigation into the very heart and immutable essence of all things actual and possible, becoming instead an inquiry into something more or less human and subject to our limitations. The contemplation of what is non-human, the discovery that "our minds are capable of dealing with material not created by them" is one of "the chief means of overcoming the terrible sense of impotence, of weakness, of exile amid hostile powers, which is too apt to result from acknowledging the all-but omnipotence of alien forces." "Real life," he says again. "is, to most men, a perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible; but the world of pure reason knows no compromise, no

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Spinoza's "intellectual love of God."

<sup>9</sup> See *ante*, p. 394. The italics are mine.

practical limitations, no barriers to creative activity. . . . Remote from human passions, remote even from the pitiful facts of nature, the generations have gradually created an ordered cosmos, where pure thought can dwell as in its natural home, and where one at least of our noble impulses can escape from the dreary exile of the actual world." There is something quite Stoic in this adjustment to nature by withdrawing into the citadel of one's reason, in this emphasis on the need of inner freedom and independence.

The result of Russell's dual universe of fact and ideal is an ethical dualism of conduct and contemplation. In both "Problems of Philosophy" and "The Elements of Ethics," Russell emphasizes the disparity between absolute "Good" and the mere expediency of "right" conduct, a dualism which is indicated throughout his essays on "The Study of Mathematics" and "The Place of Science in a Liberal Education." The Stoic emphasis on reason as an escape from the baffling purposelessness of the world of every day, would lead, we should expect, to a sort of "Wise Man" ideal of life, and of intellectual endeavor particularly; and this, in fact, is what we find in Russell's early work whenever he even distantly approaches theorizing on questions of education. His words on "knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative as it is possible for man to attain;" and his declaration that "the free intellect will see as God might see—calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire for knowledge,"<sup>10</sup> have the true Aristotelian flavor. It is natural, therefore, that the subject matter of knowledge should be thought of as somehow in a realm apart, quite unconnected with experience (as this term is generally thought of). In fact, from the purpose which Russell assigns to knowledge, the deliberate separation of the two would seem to be the most desirable end. It is natural, too, that Russell's idea of knowledge should be decidedly non-pragmatic. "Utility," he says, "can be only a consolation in moments of discouragement, not a guide in the direction of our studies," and again, "In the application of the results of mathematics to the world in time and space, its certainty and precision are lost among approximations and working hypotheses." He never thinks of ultimately justifying intellectual activity as the means of fulfilling any type of human need, but that of a sort of rigorous intellectual estheticism. The nearest he comes to compromise is to concede reluctantly that "the effects of mathematics upon practical life, though they should not be regarded as the motive of our studies, may be used to answer a doubt to which solitary studies must always be liable." The beauty of mathematical principles, irre-

<sup>10</sup> See *ante*, p. 396.

spective of their consequences, is much more often on his theme. He lays stress upon the fact that not mere living is to be desired, but the art of living in the contemplation of great things,<sup>11</sup> and he tends to class as mere living all attention to merely practical pursuits. It is but logical that his contrast between fact and ideas, particular instances and universal laws, should tend toward a contrast between thinkers and doers, peopling these disparate realms. He even goes so far as to speak of mathematics as "an end in itself and not a technical training for engineers." Thus for Russell knowledge, far from being assimilated to the practical activities of men, would aim rather at the active contemplation, as it were, of esthetic interest.

It will be seen that Russell's is a distinctly non-social, or rather a-social, theory of education. The whole trend of his philosophy is toward intellectual individualism. Thought is a means of escape, rather than an integral, organic part of experience. The object of education is to make each man Stoically self-sufficient, rather than to make him better fitted to live in the world with his fellow men, each adding to the richness and meaning of the other's life. Of course, there is a sort of intellectual community among the intellectually passionate, but it is obviously a democracy limited in its range. Although Russell does speak of the refined cooperation required in all scientific endeavor, he never thinks of proclaiming, as Professor Dewey does, that "the things which are socially most fundamental, that is, which *have to do with the experiences in which the widest groups share, are the essentials*; [that] the things which represent the needs of specialized groups and technical pursuits are secondary."<sup>12</sup>

The criticisms which I should make of Russell's *early* philosophy are on the whole pragmatic. Aside from any consideration of the technical problems involved in his whole theory of the nature and function of ideas, of which I have attempted only a general, untechnical exposition, what might be the social as well as the intellectual results attendant upon following the sort of programme of life and education which he suggests? It is obvious that Russell's ideal of knowledge demands a certain type of social environment in which to flourish. And the only type of environment, I believe, in which such an ideal of education *could* flourish is one in which his contrasts between entities and essences, conduct and contemplation, are carried over into the social distinction between practical and intellectual activity or, to put it more bluntly, thinkers and workers (in the popular sense of the term). The work of the world must

<sup>11</sup> "The Study of Mathematics."

<sup>12</sup> *Democracy and Education*, p. 225. Italics mine.

get itself done one way or another, and with the withdrawal of the intellectually passionate into the citidal of reason, even allowing for periodic "descents into the world of action."<sup>13</sup> the burden of getting it done devolves upon those who have not the leisure or the means so to withdraw. In other words, a theory of education such as this has for its correlate the existence and the maintenance of distinctions of economic caste as pernicious as those existing to-day.

Again, in spite of the fact that Russell, like Aristotle, seems to recognize the "activity of contemplation," his early attitude is essentially passive. It faces the evils of the world unsentimentally—and then solves the problem by escaping rather than by conquering them. Like the attitude of the Stoics and the early Christians toward slavery, the first solution of the problem of evil which Russell offers might, if universally accepted, become the greatest imaginable stumbling block to political or economic advancement. It may be in a measure true, as Professor Perry says, that "as in the case of science, so here also, that theory will best serve life which abstracts from life." But detachment can serve life only if it returns repeatedly and often to life to draw from it fresh vigor and substance. In any other case, knowledge is emptied of all real content by being removed from contact with the world. For a Stoic solution to the problem of the disparity between the actual and the ideal (in whatever form it may be found) is not a solution, but only "a sort of divided allegiance, according to which men continue to maintain as citizens what they condemn as human beings."<sup>14</sup> And such an ideal of life, universally or rather popularly accepted, might easily deteriorate into a sort of intellectual fiddling while Rome burns—while children are toiling in sweat shops and cotton mills, while labor is struggling for a share in the control of industry, while consumption goes on in order that production may flourish, while human beings and human issues are judged according to canons of abstract justice and outgrown law.

There are certain qualities of Russell's early philosophy, however, which can not be overlooked. One can not but feel the moral fervor which sweeps one on—ardent conviction, sincerity and a tonic and bracing absence of all sentimentality. Russell's early work is noble as much for the spirit in which it is written as for any plan of life actually set forth. It seems strange that this so to speak un-ethical philosophy should possess a genuine ethical significance, a significance quite different, I feel certain, from that which its author intended. Strange, too, that a philosopher so anti-humanistic in his theory of values should have so vivid, so al-

<sup>13</sup> "Free Man's Worship."

<sup>14</sup> Delisle Burns: *Polit. Ideals*.

most painful a sensitiveness to the inherent value of human life as human life, of human beings as human beings. One misses, no doubt, a certain zest for life which somehow seems to need no justification. Yet Russell's are no less "brave words in which high courage glowed."

Aside, however, from any romantic appreciation of the spirit of Russell's work; aside, too, from what I may naïvely term its weakness, *i. e.*, its abstractness—for all philosophy is abstract which is not connected with life and actual experience in the greatest possible number of relationships—nevertheless it must be pointed out that it does emphasize a consideration almost as important as the social implications of his Neo-Stoicism: namely, that needs must be interpreted in a broader sense than is usual among evolutionary philosophies and their numerous offshoots, that purely intellectual needs have just as much right to satisfaction as any more practical. The problem is of course to relate the two, and such a synthesis is at least attempted by Russell in his work done since 1914.

There is a fundamental consistency in all of Russell's writings on the theory of knowledge that renders most astonishing the great change in the implications for the conduct of life which result simply from that change of emphasis which characterizes his later work. I mean that it is the world of fact which now claims his attention. It is almost as though he had lost interest in a Truth to which, as he himself says, human conduct can have no reference. It is not that he denies its existence, nor that he might not, if put to it, defend his former theories. It is simply that he is interested in more immediate things—politics and economics and education for instance. He has, so to speak, "descended" from the world of ideal relationships and mathematical truths into a world of ordinary human beings, and in this world he is working to better the state of things as he finds it. He is no doubt as much of an intellectualist as before. But there is a subtle difference. He no longer praises reason as a means of escaping from the world of things-as-they-are. "The life of the mind, although supremely excellent in itself," he says,<sup>15</sup> "can not bring health into the life of instinct, except when it results in a not too difficult outlet for the instinct of creation. In other cases it is, as a rule, too widely separated from instinct, too detached, too destitute of inward growth, to afford either a vehicle for instinct or a means of subtilizing and refining it."

It is around the notion of *Impulse* that the whole of Russell's later theory of conduct, both social and individual, and of education, is rooted. Impulse he holds, is the basis of all of men's activities.

<sup>15</sup> *Why Men Fight*, p. 234.

It is from the conflict or the distortion of impulses, through lack of proper direction, that most of the evils of society spring—war, economic evils, the various injustices which the domination of outgrown institutions occasions. It is true, he says, that artificially created desires and purposes have come more and more to regulate men's lives. Yet it is from impulse that all healthy activity must spring. "There is less harm in indulging a spurious impulse for a time," he says,<sup>16</sup> "than in thwarting an impulse which is genuine." "It is not the weakening of impulse that is to be desired, but the *direction* of impulse toward life and growth, rather than toward death and decay."<sup>17</sup>

And herein lies the function of education—so to direct the *expression* of these impulses that they satisfy the individual's craving for activity at the same time that conflict with the free expression of the impulses of another is guarded against. Such a redirection is possible because "almost any instinct is capable of many different forms, according to the nature of the outlets which it finds," and because, within certain wide limits, "the instinctive part of our character is very malleable. It may be changed by beliefs, by material circumstances, by social circumstances, by institutions." The purpose, then, of education is to help create a social environment in which those impulses which are creative rather than possessive may find free and spontaneous play. And, conversely, "the most important purpose that political institutions can achieve is to keep alive in individuals creativeness, vitality, vigor, and the joy of life."<sup>18</sup> The great indictment which Russell brings against the existing economic system is that it not only fails to afford anything like adequate opportunity for the expression of the creative impulses, but that it tends to perpetuate itself by the establishment of false standards of achievement. The problems of economics and politics are therefore one with the problem of education.

It will be seen that such a theory is truly social in its character, in spite of the importance which Russell places upon the expression of individual impulses. "If men's natural growth is to be promoted and not hindered by the environment," he says, "political institutions must, as far as possible, *embody common purposes and foster instinctive likings.*"

Such a conception of the importance and function of impulse will necessarily be antagonistic to any view of education as a *preparation* for life, rather than as an intimate and organic phase of

<sup>16</sup> "Individual Liberty and Public Control," *Atlantic*, Vol. 120, 1917.

<sup>17</sup> *Why Men Fight*.

<sup>18</sup> *Why Men Fight*, p. 143.

living itself. Russell's whole contrast between purpose and impulse, and his emphasis on the need of their reconciliation, imply this. "A life governed by purposes and desires, to the exclusion of impulse," he says—"exhausts vitality and leaves a man in the end indifferent to the very purposes which he has been trying to achieve." The Russell of to-day is vastly more militant than the older Russell. "The world is *our* world," he cries, "and it rests with us to make it a heaven or a hell. The power is ours, and the kingdom and the glory would be ours also if we had courage and insight to create them." Another point of contrast with Russell's older views is that there is now no dualism of thought and activity, knowing and doing. "Education," he now declares, "should not aim at passive awareness—but at an activity *directed toward the world that our efforts are to create.*" His whole discussion of property and the labor movement, in *Why Men Fight*, emphasizes not only the necessity for concrete thought, but the *continuity* of the life of thought and the life of labor.

But quite as important as this social point of view, is his emphasis on the inherent worth of the individual as an individual, and not only as the contemplator of the Eternal Verities. Education must be founded on reverence for the personality of even little children. Russell is an individualist in education as in politics. What men need, he says, is more self-direction, more outlet for creativeness, less involuntary subservience to purposes not their own. Yet such an individualism is democratic rather than aristocratic, inasmuch as it is through the *proper* satisfaction of his impulses that the individual, far from cultivating a self-sufficient aloofness, is kept in close contact with the general life of his fellow-beings.<sup>19</sup> The satisfaction of the ends which one's own spirit is obscurely seeking need not mean to be a detached isolated unit.

This democratic individualism, with its emphasis upon the continuity between thought and action, has certain implications for the problem of discipline in social life and in education. Just as impulse and will should be aspects of the same activity, just as the only tolerable social environment is one which fosters the free expression of the creative impulse and is itself an expression of those impulses, so the only effective discipline is that which comes from within, "which consists in the power of pursuing a distant object steadily, foregoing and suffering many things on the way. This involves the subordination of impulse to will, the power of directing action by large creative desires even at moments when they are not vividly alive." Interest and discipline should be continuous with each other. Of

<sup>19</sup> *Why Men Fight*, p. 232.

course, Russell points out, literal and complete liberty is impossible if children are to be taught anything. Yet the teacher's aim should be to reduce this element of restraint to a minimum, fostering the discipline which springs from interest and absorption in work, rather than from external authority.

"This kind of discipline," Russell points out, "can only result from strong desires for ends not immediately attainable and can only be produced by education if education fosters such desires, which it seldom does at present."<sup>20</sup> "Where authority is unavoidable," he says, "What is needed is *reverence*."<sup>21</sup> He denounces all methods of instruction which lead to passive acceptance of the teacher's knowledge. Education should foster the growth of mind and spirit, not merely cultivate "certain mechanical aptitudes which take the place of living thought."

The contrasts between this philosophy and its forerunner are obvious. It is constructive rather than contemplative, active, not passive. There is no longer an opposition between pure thought and practical activity. Not but that Russell himself might not be unwilling to concede any contradiction in the attitudes implicit in his earlier and later work. "The creative impulses of which I speak," he might say, "given free play, would find their highest expression in that theoretical understanding of the world which is the aim of philosophy." Perhaps, then, it would be better to say that the most significant difference between the older and the newer Russell is that the Russell of to-day is never abstract. By this I do not mean that he does not speak in general terms of many general subjects. What I mean is that he never loses sight of various problems and consideration—individual and social, economic, political, religious, or educational—in their relation to each other. And this concreteness, this greater adequacy in dealing with the problems of this lesser world, is due, I believe, to the fact that Russell's method is now psychological rather than logical, that to-day his idealism, while it never overlooks the justification of intellectual activity *per se* as one type of need, renders itself stable and healthy by sublimating the life of instinct instead of ignoring it.

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<sup>20</sup> *Why Men Fight*, pp. 168-170.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.